



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

To:

Further and Higher Education Institutions in Wales  
Registered EMA/WGLG (FE) learning centres  
The Student Loans Company  
UCAS  
NUS Wales  
Children's Commissioner for Wales

August 2018

Dear Colleague

**EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (EMA) AND WELSH GOVERNMENT  
LEARNING GRANT (FURTHER EDUCATION) (WGLG (FE)) SCHEMES FOR  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2018/19.**

This Information Notice provides details of the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes for AY 2018/19. Please ensure that the SFWIN is circulated to all staff and colleagues who administer the schemes.

**ENQUIRIES**

If you have any queries about EMA and/or WGLG (FE) or this Information Notice, please contact the Higher Education Division, Welsh Government - email [studentfinancedivision@gov.wales](mailto:studentfinancedivision@gov.wales). We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request. A copy of this Information Notice can be downloaded in [Welsh](#) or [English](#).



## 1. EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes 2018/19

The awards and income thresholds for the means-tested EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes have been maintained at AY 2017/18 levels. The Student Loans Company (SLC) will continue to administer applications, as part of its Student Finance Wales (SFW) service, on behalf of the Welsh Government

SFW's bilingual customer service can be contacted on 0300 200 4050. Application forms and guidance notes for AY 2018/19 are also available to download via the SFW website. Application packs have been distributed to those schools and colleges who administer the schemes. Information about the schemes is available via the SFW website: [www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe](http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe).

### Removal of transitional arrangements for returning students who started their course(s) prior to 1 September 2015

In 2015 SLC introduced an electronic verification of household income (VHI) assessment<sup>1</sup>. This is a data-sharing link between the SLC and HMRC to verify household income, which reduces the level of original paper evidence supplied with an application. Transitional arrangements were introduced which enabled SFW to continue to administer returning EMA and WGLG (FE) students who started their course(s) prior to 1 September 2015. The transitional arrangements (currently set out under Part 1, 17/18 EMA Scheme and Part 5, WGLG (FE) 17/18 Scheme) will not be included in the 18/19 schemes as there will be no returning students who had started their course(s) prior to September 2015.

SLC's current VHI arrangements for new and returning EMA/WGLG (FE) students who started their courses on or after 1 September 2015 will continue in AY 2018/19.

## 2. Care Leavers

### WGLG (FE) Scheme

Care leavers who apply for WGLG (FE) support for the first time in AY 2018/19, and are aged under 25, before the first day of the academic year, will not be subject to a household income assessment and will qualify for the maximum full or part-time WGLG (FE) grants, subject to satisfying other eligibility criteria. A care leaver's partner's income won't be considered either.

The change will bring the WGLG (FE) Scheme inline with the higher education (HE) student support offer for care leavers for AY 2018/19, following the comprehensive independent review of HE funding and student finance arrangements in Wales (the Diamond Review).

Care leavers aged 25 or over on the first day of the AY, for which they are being assessed, will be treated as an independent student for WGLG (FE) purposes. They will

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/media/9311/student-finance-wales-information-notice-02-2015-.pdf>

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need to provide details of any residual income and partner income (if applicable) with the application which will be subject to SFW's household income assessment.

Returning WGLG (FE) students, who are care leavers and aged under or over 25, will continue to be subject to SFW's means-testing assessment. The majority of care leavers do receive the maximum full or part-time grant.

### EMA Scheme

The EMA Scheme already provides categories for an exempt person who is not subject to SFW's means-testing assessment of household income. The EMA exempt person categories include a person who '*is in local authority care, with foster parents or is a care leaver*'. An interpretation of a care leaver has been included in the EMA Scheme for AY 2018/19, helping to provide clarity who will not be subject to the Scheme's means-tested financial assessment. The interpretation is similar to that in the WGLG (FE) Scheme, although it should be noted that the age eligibility categories are different for each scheme.

The EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes will primarily rely on the definition of care leavers set out at paragraph 104 in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

If care leavers have any questions or queries about eligibility or help in completing an application form they can contact the SFW customer service helpline (<https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe/contact-us.aspx>).

## 3. Residency Categories

### Stateless Person

A stateless person category has been added to the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes for AY 2018/19. An eligible applicant will need to meet the required eligibility criteria for EMA or WGLG (FE) and must be:

- granted leave to remain as a stateless person by the Home Office (HO);
- ordinarily resident in Wales on the first day of the first academic year of the course; and
- ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands at all times since being granted leave to remain as a stateless person.

This includes family members of stateless persons who hold valid leave to remain in the UK. The new category is included in the EMA and WGLG (FE) application and guidance notes. A Stateless person category has also been included in the relevant higher education (HE) statutory student support regulations and subject to agreement by the Welsh Ministers a similar change will be made to the Financial Contingency Fund (Further Education) (FCF (FE)) Scheme 2018/19.

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### Removal of the Syrian nationals (Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) Programme) category

The existing category for VPR will be removed from the schemes for AY 2018/19. Eligible VPR persons (and their family members) applying for support in AY 2018/19 will be captured by SFW on the application form under the existing category of refugee (and their family members), as per the category of refugee set out under Part 1 and Part 2 of the Schedule in the 2018/19 EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes.

### Persons granted leave to enter or remain

A technical amendment has been made under Part 1 and Part 2 of the Schedule in the 2018/19 EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes to clarify the eligible categories for persons (and their family members) who have been granted leave to enter or remain accordingly, including those on the grounds of private life or outside of the immigration rules under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. A similar amendment has been made to the relevant HE student support regulations and subject to agreement by the Welsh Ministers a similar change will be made to the FCF (FE) Scheme 2018/19.

### Home Office (HO) immigration expiry dates

SFW has strengthened its eligibility checks to confirm nationality and residency for the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes. SFW already captures the HO expiry dates as part of its eligibility checks for HE statutory student support.

The application form will capture the HO immigration expiry date for certain categories when applying for support. Further information is provided in the EMA and WGLG (FE) application form and guidance notes.

The purpose of SFW capturing the HO expiry date is administrative to ensure that eligible students continue to remain eligible for support for the duration of their course. This will provide a joined up approach across FE and HE student support.

## **4. Her Majesty's Passport Office (HMPO) identify validation**

Applicants must meet identity and age requirements to qualify for support. As part of the application and assessment process, applicants are currently required to send their original passports to SFW for checking.

SLC currently check HE applicants via its HMPO validation link. For AY 2018/19, SLC will utilise their HMPO validation link to check FE applicants, who are valid UK passport holders. New FE applicants can supply their valid Passport number in their EMA or WGLG (FE) application form and SFW will check their details with HMPO. The check verifies a student's identity.

The change aims to provide an improved application process and reduce original paper evidence being supplied with an application. SFW will accept alternative evidence types if students do not hold a valid UK passport. Information is available in the EMA and WGLG (FE) application guidance notes.

## **5. Welsh Language preference**

SFW will capture a new student's language preference in the EMA and WGLG (FE) application form. For returning students the language preference option has been added to the EMA and WGLG (FE) mandatory learning agreement template forms. This is a temporary solution for returning students until SFW is able to capture the language preference in the student's initial application.

Learning centres should capture the returning student's language preference on SLC's Learning Centre Portal. Further information is available in SLC's Learning Centre System User Guidance.